



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – January 2013 Save Our Creeks (and Streets) – Maintain Your Car

The Russian River Watershed Association through its member agencies strives to inform community members about our watershed. This series of articles serves as a tool to educate the community in ways to promote and maintain healthy watersheds.

Each of us can do our part to maintain clean and healthy waterways. To that end we need to look at our vehicles parked at the curb or in the driveway. Drips and leaks from vehicles as well as debris on streets is conveyed untreated through storm drains into our waterways.

Why are we concerned about leaking vehicles?

Oil, antifreeze, and other auto fluids which leak from our vehicles ultimately can be carried by storm water runoff into our creeks and waterways. Once this pollution enters the waterway, all forms of aquatic life suffer the consequences. In addition, oil which drips on the same spot of the pavement year after year will eventually cause the pavement to deteriorate and break up.

How do I know if my car or truck is leaking?

Unless you are a mechanic, the best way to tell if your vehicle has a leak is to look at the pavement / driveway after you move your car. If you see a dark patch or evidence of a liquid (oil, antifreeze, brake fluid, etc.) then you have a leak. Also, if you see a colorful sheen on the pavement surface after a rain storm you have a fluid leak. A green colored liquid typically indicates an antifreeze leak.

What can you do about a leak?

It is important to clean up all leaks promptly. Antifreeze can be toxic to pets and other neighborhood animals. Do not hose leaked fluids into the street. If your car has leaked on your driveway, you can use oil absorbent such as cat litter or an absorbent product available at auto supply shops to clean up the spill. Be sure to sweep up the absorbent material and dispose of it in the garbage.

As soon as possible, take your vehicle to a mechanic to have the leak repaired. If this doesn't resolve the problem, maybe it is time to look into buying that new car you have always dreamed about.

What does your City do about spills and leaks?

In extreme cases, you may see a leak trail on the street for several blocks. This indicates a major failure of a vehicle. City Public Works crew respond to these leaks by applying absorbent materials and then calling the street sweeper to clean up the oil saturated material. If you observe a major spill or leak on



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the street please notify your Public Works Department or the Police Department. The City street sweeper helps to clean up leaks and debris on the streets.

Remember, the ultimate responsibility for leaks and drips from vehicles lies with the vehicle owner. Please do your part to reduce pollution by maintaining your vehicle so that we can all enjoy clean and healthy waterways.

This article was authored by Rick Seanor of the City of Ukiah on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.